

Würzburg High

Story and Photos by
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ENTER Würzburg High School in Germany and you'll encounter a typically American academic environment that has been enhanced by the advantages of its unique location and close contact with local communities.

"We have a twofold mission," said Principal Charlie Toth, "to address the kids' needs, including the 68 percent who intend to go on to college, and to establish a community environment that's stable, secure and the center of military life.

"I want people to say: 'My child goes to Würzburg High School, and I'm proud of it,'" said Toth. "Soldiers need to go wherever the Army sends them, assured that their kids' needs are being met by professionals within the Department of Defense school system.

"Among parents' primary concerns is child safety," Toth said. "That we're located on a military complex, secured by the military, is a tremendous asset." In the DOD school system since 1979, Toth has never known of a serious incident occurring anywhere within that system in Germany.

He's also never experienced kids in crisis because of deployments, he said. "There are always kids in crisis for other reasons — because of breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend, for example — things that we don't necessarily hear about.

"But our schools offer after-school programs, beyond athletics, that give kids opportunities to get involved in clubs or dance groups, so they're not home alone," he said.

Some 3,500 students from across Europe, representing international schools, host-nation schools and DOD schools, participate in a program called "Model United Nations."

The program allows them to play the roles of leaders, and debate and



Students — JROTC cadets among them — mingle in the hallway before classes begin at Würzburg High School.



Würzburg High School is a typically American institution enhanced by the advantages of its unique location.

elect officials. They study parliamentary procedures and draft resolutions, Toth said. "Model U.S. Senate" is a similar program that allows students to explore the workings of politics and government.

"We offer creative connections, too, whereby students who demonstrate talent in the arts and drama can receive instruction from stateside experts," Toth said.

Every school in U.S. Army, Europe, has an academic team that competes against other schools for recognition as academic best. Each school gets funds to send students to areas relevant to particular studies.

Two years ago Würzburg High School began taking parent surveys, to gauge similarities between schools in the states and schools in Germany, Toth said. "Those tell us that parents believe their children have more advantages over here."

Toth, who has three children in the DOD school system, said: "I'm ecstatic they're in the DOD schools. They've been given the opportunity to have the best education."

The high school accommodates some 575 students from grades nine through 12, including students who commute from Giebelstadt and Kitzingen, about 10 miles away, and Schweinfurt, about 16 miles away.

Each classroom also has computers with Internet access and extensive educational and technical software. Through the Community Education Center, seniors can take college-level courses while still in high school.

Additionally, to continue their education in Germany upon graduation, students can opt to attend the University of Maryland's Mannheim campus, a regular college campus with dormitories. The school was formerly in Munich. □

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